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Letter dated 6 August 2009 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

Further to my latest report to the Security Council concerning the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2009/330), I hereby request the Security Council to consider the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which is due to expire on 31 August 2009. In a letter dated 4 July 2009 addressed to me, the Prime Minister of Lebanon requested that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of one year, without amendment.

UNIFIL continues to play a crucial role in ensuring peace and stability in southern Lebanon, as well as full respect for the Blue Line. Sporadic incidents and violations are promptly addressed through the liaison and coordination arrangements of UNIFIL with the parties. The Tripartite meetings remain the central mechanism in this regard. Under the terms of its mandate, UNIFIL continues to take all necessary action within its capabilities to ensure that the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River is not utilized for hostile activities. The mission has provided a strong deterrent to the resumption of hostilities and has laid a foundation on which the process towards achieving a permanent ceasefire can and must be built. Until such time as the cessation of hostilities is solidified by a permanent ceasefire, the present calm in southern Lebanon will remain precarious.

Cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces is a cornerstone of the UNIFIL mandate, as outlined in resolution 1701 (2006) and reiterated in resolution 1832 (2008). UNIFIL continues to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in their efforts to ensure that the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River is free of any unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons. Since the issuance of my last report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), a serious breach of this provision was discovered on 14 July 2009, as was reported to the Security Council in closed consultations on 23 July by the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

In the early morning of 14 July 2009, a series of explosions occurred near Khirbat Silim, north-east of Tibnin in Sector West of the area of operations of UNIFIL. Preliminary findings of the investigation, conducted by UNIFIL in coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces, indicate that the explosions were caused by the deflagration of ammunition present in the building, in which a large quantity of weapons and ammunition was stored. So far, there is no evidence to suggest that the weapons and ammunition present in the building had been smuggled

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into the UNIFIL area of operations since the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006). The investigation is pending finalization. There are a number of indications that suggest that the depot was under the control of Hizbullah, and that, in contrast to weapons and ammunition previously discovered by UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces, it was not abandoned but rather actively maintained. Some of the individuals present on 15 July at the site of the explosions were identified to UNIFIL as belonging to Hizbullah.

This presence of unauthorized assets or weapons between the Blue Line and the Litani River constitutes a clear violation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). The incident highlights the importance of intensifying the efforts of the Lebanese Armed Forces, assisted by UNIFIL, to discover and remove weapons and related materiel that may still be present in the area of operations; make sure that there are no armed elements in the area; and prevent the possible smuggling of weapons across the Litani River.

In the aftermath of the explosions, on 15 and 18 July 2009, civilians attempted to obstruct the freedom of movement of UNIFIL. Stone-throwing on 18 July resulted in injury to UNIFIL peacekeepers. I am concerned about the attempts to obstruct the freedom of movement of UNIFIL. The Lebanese authorities must ensure full freedom of movement for UNIFIL within its area of operations.

The Council was also briefed on another incident, in which approximately 30 civilians approached the Blue Line, and several members of the group walked across it on 17 July 2009 near United Nations position 4-31, in the vicinity of Kafr Shouba (Sector West). The civilians were protesting against construction works by the Israel Defense Forces just south of the Blue Line, in the Shab'a farms area.

I note that, notwithstanding substantial progress on the implementation of some elements of resolution 1701 (2006), more work remains to be done. The Lebanese authorities have the primary responsibility to ensure that there are no unauthorized armed personnel, assets or weapons in the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River. UNIFIL assists the Lebanese Armed Forces in this endeavour.

The Israel Defense Forces continue their occupation of part of the village of Ghajar, and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Israel must withdraw the Israel Defense Forces from the area. Israel also must cease its air violations, which contribute to tension and continue unabated. In addition, ground violations of the Blue Line should stop; inadvertent crossings can be reduced by accelerating progress on visibly marking the Blue Line.

The United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre continues to play an important role in coordinating the clearance of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war in the UNIFIL area of operations, which allows for the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). The Coordination Centre will continue to support the Lebanese Mine Action Centre.

The total number of UNIFIL military personnel as at 15 July 2009 stands at 12,000. That number includes 11,000 UNIFIL ground troops deployed in two sectors, and 700 personnel serving in the Maritime Task Force, in addition to 208 staff officers at UNIFIL headquarters, 59 staff officers at UNIFIL sector headquarters and 17 national support elements. The UNIFIL civilian component numbers 318 international and 666 national staff.

With regard to recent and forthcoming changes to the troop configuration of UNIFIL, Malaysia deployed one additional infantry company of 150 personnel at the end of July 2009. Indonesia and Nepal are each scheduled to deploy one infantry company of 150 personnel over the next two months. These manoeuvre unit reinforcements are in response to the need identified in my report of 3 March 2009 (S/2009/119). In addition, a new multirole logistics company will be deployed to replace Polish troops due to withdraw by October 2009.

During the past year, the Maritime Task Force of UNIFIL has witnessed a gradual decrease in the number of available assets. This trend recently reached its lowest level, only 7 of the 12 vessels identified in the force requirements being available. Since June, the significantly reduced number of assets, and especially the lack of frigates, has meant that the Maritime Task Force is stretched to the limits in carrying out its dual mandate of maritime interdiction operations and training of the Lebanese navy.

The Secretariat has called on 27 Member States to contribute to the Maritime Task Force since December 2008. The contribution of a corvette by Indonesia marks the only new maritime contributor. Many of the old maritime contributors have been helpful in bridging the gaps, and Belgium and Italy have assumed the leadership of the Maritime Task Force for three-month periods, respectively, since EUROMARFOR ended its one-year term on 28 February 2009. As for the next operational phase, beginning on 1 September 2009, Germany has once again agreed to assume the leadership, this time for a three-month period.

Three years have passed since the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006). My reports on the implementation of that resolution reflect the fact that conditions on the ground have significantly improved since the deployment of the expanded UNIFIL and that much has been achieved. Nevertheless, much remains to be done. As a matter of course, the UNIFIL Force Commander and Head of Mission continuously assesses whether the Force's assets and resources are configured most appropriately to fulfil its mandated tasks, and makes the necessary adjustments accordingly. Taking the developments over the past three years into account, it is timely to take stock of the operational capacity of UNIFIL and conduct a more comprehensive review. Hence, in an effort to ensure continued operational effectiveness and in keeping with peacekeeping good practice, an assessment of the force structure, assets and requirements of UNIFIL will be conducted during the coming months by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNIFIL, with an emphasis on capabilities. This review will include a comprehensive evaluation of the Maritime Task Force. The troop-contributing countries will be kept informed throughout the process.

I would reiterate that it remains essential that the international community assist the Lebanese Armed Forces to become a more effective military organization, resourced to fulfil their many responsibilities, including down to the Blue Line. The long-term objective of UNIFIL is to gradually transfer responsibilities currently carried out by the Force, on land and at sea, to the Lebanese Armed Forces, and have the Lebanese Armed Forces assume effective security control over the UNIFIL area of operations and Lebanese territorial waters, in line with resolution 1701 (2006).

I am grateful to the 31 troop-contributing countries that make up UNIFIL for their ongoing commitment. That commitment, coupled with the development of a

strong peacekeeping partnership with the Lebanese Armed Forces, has made possible the successful implementation of several key aspects of resolution 1701 (2006). However, as the UNIFIL mandate approaches its expiration date, it is clear that challenges remain.

I would also like to express my strong appreciation to the UNIFIL Force Commander and Head of Mission, Major General Graziano, and to all the military and civilian personnel of UNIFIL, for the excellent work they are carrying out in southern Lebanon in the service of peace.

Regarding the financial aspects of UNIFIL, by its resolution 63/298, the General Assembly appropriated to the Special Account for UNIFIL the total amount of US $589.7 million gross for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNIFIL beyond 31 August 2009, the cost of maintaining it will be limited to the amounts approved by the General Assembly.

As at 31 May 2009, unpaid assessed contributions to the UNIFIL Special Account amounted to $86.1 million. At present, money owed to the Member States that contribute the troops who make up UNIFIL totals $13.4 million. Reimbursements of troop and contingent-owned equipment costs have been made for the periods up to 31 May 2009 and 31 March 2009, respectively, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full to clear all remaining arrears.

With the above information in mind, I recommend that the Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of 12 months, until 31 August 2010.

I should be grateful if you would bring this letter to the attention of the members of the Council.

(*Signed*) **Ban** Ki-moon